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                     UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
                    FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY
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                                   CIVIL ACTION NUMBER:
    IN RE: VALSARTAN PRODUCTS
                                   19-md-02875
    LIABILITY LITIGATION
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                                   STATUS CONFERENCE VIA
                                   ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCE
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         Mitchell H. Cohen Building & U.S. Courthouse
         4th & Cooper Streets
 8
         Camden, New Jersey 08101
         December 14, 2022
 9
         Commencing at 4:04 p.m.
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    BEFORE:
                        THE HONORABLE THOMAS I. VANASKIE (RET.)
11
                        SPECIAL MASTER
12
    APPEARANCES:
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14
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               produced by computer-aided transcription.
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    ALSO PRESENT:
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         Judicial Law Clerk to The Honorable Robert B. Kugler
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         Larry MacStravic, Courtroom Deputy
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             (PROCEEDINGS held via Zoom before SPECIAL MASTER
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    THOMAS I. VANASKIE at 4:04 p.m.)
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             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Are you going to be the
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    spokesperson for plaintiffs today?
             MR. SLATER: Only on the scheduling issue with the
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    experts. I think the other issues, other people probably will
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    speak to them.
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             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Very well.
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             And you know the drill here. Keep your phones muted,
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    please. If you need to put us on hold, please make sure we're
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    not going to be listening to elevator music. And don't put us
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    on hold if you can avoid it. You can mute us, but don't put
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    us on hold.
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             And I think we're ready to get started.
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             We'll address the question of scheduling first. And
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    I wanted to see where things stand with respect to the
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    deadlines for defense liability expert reports.
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             Who's addressing this issue for the defense?
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             MR. BERNARDO: Rich Bernardo, Your Honor, counsel for
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    ZHP.
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             How are you today?
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             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: I'm well, Mr. Bernardo.
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             MR. BERNARDO: I'm also in a real office or at least
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    an office.
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             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Well, where do we stand on
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MR. BERNARDO: I think we've been working very cooperatively with Mr. Slater, which I appreciate.

As I think we mentioned in our letter, there were a couple of experts who just had some illness issues that have caused us to ask for an extra few days, four days to be specific, for two ZHP experts, and I also understand there was an issue with one Torrent-specific expert asking for two or three days.

So the schedule would stand that -- again, subject to plaintiffs' agreement, but this is where I think we are, that the three Teva-specific expert reports and two defense shared reports would go out on Monday as scheduled, and then on Thursday there would be the one Torrent-specific report, and then on Friday there would be the two ZHP-specific reports.

And this has also caused a couple of other dates to have to slide, largely to give plaintiffs an opportunity to I guess digest the reports. So we're trying to move one of the I know -- I don't know if there's anything to report on that, but trying try to move one of them into early February, taking into account both counsel's schedules with ZHP's responding expert to follow. And I know -- and Teva can respond, but I know they're also trying to come up with a stipulation to not have to have their experts follow that.

So that was a very long answer, Your Honor, but I

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think we're coming toward some agreement. And I'll let Adam
tell the Court where we are in response to what I had sent out
earlier today.
         SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: All right. Mr. Slater.
         MR. SLATER: Yes, Judge, I think that everything
Mr. Bernardo said is correct.
         Obviously, if there's issues that hold up the
reports, we understand the Court's view to that, and we want
to work with the defense.
         We just -- the issue that came up for us is if the
reports come right before Christmas, Christmas is already a
loss, so it pushes things into the month of January. And
we're waiting to hear back from two experts about pushing
their depositions about a week. And the other expert,
Dr. Bain, we've confirmed she can be deposed the very
beginning of February. So that works fine.
         And then we've agreed that ZHP can then produce their
responsive expert after that, which makes a lot of sense.
                                                           The
plaintiff expert will go first, then the defense expert.
         And Teva had some concerns that we spoke about, which
I can't imagine we're not going to work out, just to give them
some comfort on this.
         The only thing is just figuring out if that affects
any other deadlines and how it does, which I don't know that
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we really have to burden you with that today, because my

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assumption is that -- we're just waiting to hear back from two
of the experts. They just, for whatever reason, didn't get
back to us today after we spoke this morning.
         Once we get that worked out, I think we'll be able to
very quickly provide Your Honor some proposed adjustments that
should be pretty minor, by a few weeks for a few things. And
we're okay with that, because we think that obviously over the
holidays and with illnesses, we have to do the best we can.
         SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE:
         Who's on the phone for Teva?
         MS. LOCKARD: Hi, Judge Vanaskie. It's Victoria
Lockard from Greenberg Traurig. How are you?
         SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Good. How are you?
        MS. LOCKARD: Good. I'm great.
         So I can tell you what our situation is. We are
planning on behalf of Teva to submit our expert reports by the
original deadline. We're not asking for any extensions. We
have our witnesses gathering dates for us with anticipation
that we would be able to provide their depositions by the
January 31st deadline or within a day or two after.
         The issue that we spoke about with Mr. Bernardo and
Mr. Slater relates to their witness, plaintiffs' witness,
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Susan Bain. And we did not want to have any of plaintiffs'

position, and based on the scheduling order, was intended I

experts be deposed after Teva's experts. I mean, frankly, our

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think so that we would get the benefit of plaintiffs' experts deposition testimony before ours are deposed and respond to those criticisms.
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In speaking with Mr. Slater, it appears that Susan Bain would be the only one who would have to go after Teva's experts. And he has assured us that she will not have opinions or criticisms that stray beyond her report, and her report on its face does not apply to Teva in terms of opinions or criticisms. And we wanted to get some sort of stipulation agreed upon in writing so that we both have some clarity on that.

What we don't want to do is have our experts be deposed and then have Susan Bain be deposed subsequently and come up with, you know, opinions that pertain to Teva and then have our experts not available to respond to those criticisms.

Mr. Slater says that's not going to happen. I agree.

I think we'll be able to work it out. But, you know, it's always through the devil in the details.

So we'll endeavor to try to get that resolved and get that committed to writing so that we can get everything squared away and we'll move on, move forward.

SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: It sounds like everything is agreeable.

MR. SLATER: It does, Your Honor. And as Ms. Lockard said, Dr. Bain wrote a report with CGMP opinions pertaining to

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    experts have said in their depositions that take place
    earlier.
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             As long as the commitment is that she will not stray
    beyond what is in her expert reports and that those opinions
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    in her expert report will not be used against Teva, then I
    think we have an agreement.
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             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: All right. Mr. Slater, do
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    we have an agreement?
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             MR. SLATER: Let me look at what's written down.
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    There's some fairly broad language in there. I mean, I'd have
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    to look at what it says.
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             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Understood.
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             MR. SLATER: I can just again -- I have an expert who
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    wrote a report focusing on ZHP. Her opinions pertain to ZHP.
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    That's who she focused on. That's where her criticisms are as
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    to CGMP issues. She had no CGMP criticisms of Teva or Torrent
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    in her report.
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             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Okay. Very well.
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             All right. So I'll just put this down in the
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    category of to be continued, but it looks like it's pretty
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    complete.
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             MR. BERNARDO: Thank you, Your Honor.
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             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Thank you. Let's talk now
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    about the losartan and irbesartan fact sheets.
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             Marlene, are you going to be addressing this issue?
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             MS. GOLDENBERG: That's me, Your Honor. How are you?
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             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Ms. Goldenberg, I'm sorry.
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    Yes.
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             I'm well. Thank you.
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             MS. GOLDENBERG: Marlene is fine.
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             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: All right.
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             MS. GOLDENBERG: And I'm happy to start. I don't
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    know if the defendants are -- who is speaking for them, but I
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    think you saw from our agenda letter that thankfully we've had
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    some very productive meet and confers. We're down to really
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    just one subissue that's left. And it's the question of who
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    has to do this and what do they have to do.
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             So, you know, our position is that the plaintiffs who
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    filed these mixed-use cases of course have already filed very
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    lengthy, I think 40-some pages, plaintiff fact sheets of
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    information. And, you know, the claims that each client has,
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    their cancer cases and their medical history is the same,
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    their medical records are the same, their medical bills are
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    the same, and everything else is the same, except now they're
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    just, you know, disclosing what is already in their Complaint,
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    which is that they took contaminated losartan or irbesartan.
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             Based on that, you know, I understand that the
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    defendants put in their agenda letter that plaintiffs weren't
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    answering questions with -- with anything other than valsartan
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    in mind, but that really just isn't true, because the injuries
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1 are the same and so is everything else that I just listed. 2 So what we've offered is for those plaintiffs to 3 submit a supplement, which really is just the use section that 4 gives the defendants all the information they would need about 5 the contaminated products that they took, losartan and/or 6 irbesartan, but there really isn't any reason to require 7 plaintiffs to engage in this copy/paste operation that I should add is now more complicated because the defendants --9 you know, we accommodated many of their requests to reorganize 10 sections in the plaintiff fact sheet. So what otherwise might 11 have been a simple, you know, select all and paste really 12 isn't going to be that. We're going to have to compare each 1.3 and every question and paste in the exact same information 14 that they already have. So it's really just a pragmatic 15 question. 16 SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Uh-huh. Very well. 17 Who is addressing this issue for the defense? 18 MS. DEAL: Good afternoon, Your Honor. This Kate 19 Deal of Morgan Lewis. I'll be addressing this issue on behalf 20 of the defense group. 21 SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Good afternoon, Ms. Deal. 22 MS. DEAL: So, Your Honor, you know, I think it is --23 it's great news that we don't have any disputes left as to the 24 form or substance of the revised PFS. And as counsel said,

the only question that's left for Your Honor's consideration

is whether plaintiffs who used multiple products and are asserting claims under multiple sartans and who have completed the valsartan-only PFS, whether they should complete the new PFS that covers the additional products and their additional claims. And we think for several reasons the answer is yes.

And first, obviously for consistency and uniformity purposes, it makes good sense to have one comprehensive fact sheet that covers all three implicated sartans and the claims based upon those different drugs for each plaintiff and

particularly for multi-use plaintiffs, rather than trying to do a piecemeal approach where facts and claims from the same

plaintiff as to multiple drugs are cobbled together with

13 additional forms or addenda.

And second, Your Honor, the plaintiffs' alternative proposal in our view really doesn't work because it doesn't actually provide the parties with the requisite information as to each sartan.

As counsel just stated, plaintiffs have suggested using the valsartan-only fact sheet and then appending simply product usage information as to losartan and irbesartan.

But the reality is the plaintiffs who have used multiple drugs implicated in the MDL, they have to provide facts pertaining to their claimed damages, their claimed injuries; their alleged advertising exposure as to each drug implicated in their clams; alleged fraud; alleged instructions

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from their prescribers, which may be different depending upon the drug at issue; discussions with those prescribers; communications with the defendants for each implicated product; their possession of product labeling or packaging among a variety of other claims, including documentation. And it's not sufficient to simply have that for a valsartan claim and then be left to guess or speculate which, if any, of that information is the same for losartan or irbesartan. Right? We need that information for all of the sartans that are forming the basis of any particular multi-use plaintiff's claims. And so the alternative proposal, it just doesn't work because it doesn't provide that information. So what we've done here is taken a more comprehensive and streamlined and hopefully more organized approach, which carries the benefit of the years of experience we've had thus far in the MDL, where these multi-use plaintiffs will simply -- you know, they've already collected the valsartan information, and they will have to fill out a comprehensive form as to irbesartan or losartan in any event. And so we're simple asking them to do one comprehensive form. We think it makes the most sense. Ιt provides all the requisite information. It keeps things

have raised in their letter to the Court where they suggested

Now, I want to address the concern that plaintiffs

organized. It provides consistency and uniformity.

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that they were concerned that for multi-use plaintiffs who had done a valsartan-only PFS, to the extent they have provided full and complete information in that PFS as to valsartan, they were concerned that this would be some kind of gotcha exercise where defendants would try to dismiss claims based upon the revised PFS.

And it really isn't that, Your Honor. If a plaintiff has already provided full valsartan information, there really

I mean, for one thing, it's sort of unreasonable and counterfactual to assume that plaintiffs and their counsel wouldn't provide the same information in the revised form that they provided in the original form.

shouldn't be a risk of dismissal of the valsartan claims for

deficiencies in the revised PFS as to the other drugs.

But to the extent there is a discrepancy, say there's an error or something occurs, obviously that can be rectified in the meet-and-confer process that's already part of the existing order to show cause protocol.

If in that circumstance the plaintiffs say, oh, you know what, we provided this information previously, we missed it in the revised PFS, they can point to that, and we can easily work that out. But to assume that that's going to be an extensive problem I think is sort of unreasonable and counterfactual in that kind of a circumstance.

So for all of those reasons, Your Honor, the defense

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group thinks that it's important to have the multi-use plaintiffs provide a comprehensive PFS that covers all of the products upon which they're basing claims.

SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: All right. Do we have an estimate of the number of multi-use plaintiffs there may be?

MS. GOLDENBERG: I think we're probably not talking -- and this is me guessing, Your Honor, so I'll have to go back and check the docket, but I think we're talking under 200 people.

I can say the easiest solution to everything that Ms. Deal was just suggesting is that, you know, with all discovery, there's a duty to supplement. Right? And so if those answers are different for any plaintiff, and for some reason they had a conversation with their physician that was confined exclusively to irbesartan and not to valsartan, we all understand we have a duty to supplement discovery just the way the defendants do. But I still don't think that's a reason to make people copy and paste information 40 pages -- you know, 40 pages worth of information.

We can give them the use information, but the injury claims are all going to be the same. So are the records and everything there.

MS. DEAL: Your Honor, they're obviously not going to be the same. Prescribing records for different drugs by different prescribers on different dates of time are not the

same.

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And so the notion that a valsartan fact sheet, we said for valsartan we need these, you know, 40 pages of information. We need the same information for every implicated drug. And the notion that you can say, oh, for valsartan, all of these answers are going to be the same for other drugs that could be prescribed different dates of time, the injuries could be different, depending upon what was taken when, their exposure to defendants, who the defendants are, their exposure to advertising, all of the things that we've said have been necessary from the start for valsartan are necessary for all of the implicated drugs.

And so the notion that you can just base claims for irbesartan or losartan off of a valsartan-only fact sheet and simply add an addendum that says, here's the product usage data for these other implicated drugs, it just makes no sense.

SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: But it does appear to me that there are questions on the fact sheet that aren't -- the answers to which aren't dependent upon which drug you took, what sartan you took, you know, things about the personal history of the claimant, educational history, employment history, that all will stay the same. Exposure to cadmium, coal industry, whether your diet includes red or processed meats, all of that would stay the same.

Are you suggesting it would not be appropriate for a

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mixed-use plaintiff to respond by referencing the already adequate fact statement that has been submitted? Because I think we can presume these will be plaintiffs whose fact statements have survived the initial review.

MS. DEAL: I mean, to the extent that the underlying facts about who they are and where they live and where they've worked are the same and continue to be the same, I assume that they would be the same.

But my point, Your Honor, is that the drug information and all of the categories of information about drug use, drug history, prescriber information, claimed injuries, defendant advertising, all of that is going to be -- or potentially could be different. And so we want to make sure we had all of that information for every implicated product.

And the way we've done this form, which has been agreed upon by both sides. Right?

SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Right.

MS. DEAL: We all this think this makes sense and is an organized way to do this. And maybe particularly for multi-use plaintiffs who have multiple products that they've used that are implicated and form the basis of their claims. Right? Our concern is simply for all of that information, which is the heart of the plaintiff fact sheet, we can't simply rely on what was said as to valsartan and then look

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discrepancy, we can work that out. If the plaintiff counsel points back to the original fact sheet and says, oh, here it is, you know, I overlooked it, then that's resolved and it never gets to the Court.
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My concern is that for consistency, for uniformity, and also to make sure we have all of the information we need for all of these different drugs for each claimant, it just makes sense to have it organized in this fashion, given that we've now expanded the MDL to include these products and these claims.

And I think it's going to be harder for everyone to try to create a special process for this set of plaintiffs and have people referring back and forth to different documents or an addendum that's incomplete and have a totally different process for those people than the one that will be used for every other plaintiff going forward in the MDL.

MS. GOLDENBERG: Your Honor, I think where you might have been going was what I was going to suggest, which is, you know, if the defendants can find questions that aren't duplicative, we're willing to consider those. But in looking at the first half of the plaintiff fact sheet, there's not a single question that hasn't been answered where the answer would change.

And going through the second half of it, most of it's not going to change.

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And, you know, obviously counsel disagrees with me, and that's fine. But if they can narrow the set of issues that they want people answering twice, we're willing to take another look. But otherwise, our position stands. MS. DEAL: And Your Honor, I would say with respect to -- I mean, it really is just filling out the form. Right? And you'd have to fill out the form anyway to add losartan or irbesartan. It's really, like, what is the burden and what makes the most sense. I mean, so we're going to have these people have half of this sheet and then refer back to the first half of the other sheet? I mean, what is the real burden to just fill out the complete form when you're represented by counsel and this stuff is duplicative, you're telling us you already have and you've already submitted. You know, I really -- I think it creates more problems to try and piecemeal things out in that fashion. It's going to be messier. MS. GOLDENBERG: The burden is that a lot of it's being reorganized, and that again -- I mean, we've already answered these questions. And if this were standard discovery, I mean, we would insert an objection that this is duplicative and we wouldn't answer it. And I think there

MS. DEAL: And Your Honor, the other piece of it is,

would be pretty good grounds for it, because we have.

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you know, obviously, to the extent there's medical records
    that have already been, you know, produced, they've been
    uploaded, that doesn't have to occur again. It's literally
    filling out the form in a comprehensive fashion so that
    everyone doesn't have to refer back or use a different
    addendum for a special set of claims and have fights about is
    this complete, do we have what we need, this is inconsistent
    with how we're taking an approach with every other plaintiff.
    You know, what makes the most sense.
             SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Would it make sense to just
    have these mixed-use plaintiffs complete the claim information
    section of the form, section III?
             Some of it would be duplicative, I understand that.
             I guess, Ms. Goldenberg, my question to you would be,
    which question or questions on this plaintiff's fact statement
    would be completed by those plaintiffs who already submitted a
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    valsartan PFS?
             MS. GOLDENBERG: Certainly everything before the
    claim information section which you just flagged, Your Honor,
    so pages 1 through 15, it's all going to be identical, from
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And then once we get to the claim information, it's about 50/50. Questions about the cancer, not going to change.

what I can tell. I'm just skimming it again to make sure.

But I didn't see anything that would change from pages 1

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Questions about advertisements, I mean, they're there, but I'd be hard pressed to find a plaintiff who's actually seen an advertisement from a generic drug manufacturer.

All the injury stuff should be the same, because it's the same injury that they're claiming. So anything about that. Anything about medical history is going to be the same. Their educational history, their lost wages are going to be the same. Their medical expenses are going to be the same.

I mean, I can go through the whole thing. What I -I'd rather not waste Your Honor's time, but suffice it to say,
the vast majority is not going to be different.

But again, if defendants feel that they need more, I would like to hear what that is, maybe in a meet and confer.

And then we can come back to you if we still have a dispute.

But I just don't see the reason to redo this whole thing. And I know that the defendants would never agree to do the same if the tables were turned.

MS. DEAL: Your Honor, with all due respect, the defendants have just gone through pretty extensive discovery, producing a lot of things that have been duplicative of valsartan discovery. We're simply asking the plaintiffs to fill out a fact sheet and do it in an organized fashion that consolidates multi-use plaintiffs claims in one document.

The notion that they have to put their name and their educational history twice, with the assistance of counsel, and

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the -- you know, we're going to cut this up in that fashion and have four different forms and you have to refer back and forth because that's too burdensome is I think sort of a remarkable position to take.

And certainly given the amount of discovery that the defendants have produced in terms of the burden of discovery, you know, I don't think that's an argument that carries water in this context.

SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Why wouldn't it be appropriate, Ms. Deal, for a plaintiff, when he gets to the question that asks for, list all major hospitalizations, surgeries and/or procedures undergone in the last ten years, to simply refer back to the valsartan PFS?

MS. DEAL: I guess we could do that, and we could go through and piecemeal it that way, but then we don't have one comprehensive PFS. We have to go back and forth. And there will be more disputes I'm sure about that process than if we asked them to just copy and paste their medical history to both forms.

You know, if we want to Frankenstein it and, you know, do it, I guess we can, but I just don't see the value of it. And I don't see -- you know, with all due respect, I don't think this is an unreasonable burden for less than 200 plaintiffs who are now expanding their claims to include additional drugs and additional claims based on those drugs.

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It really is very basic information, and we are
trying to do it -- take an approach here that keeps it simple,
consistent, organized and efficient for everyone involved so
we don't have to come back six times to the Court and try to
do a process that is inconsistent with the process we're using
for everyone else because plaintiffs don't want to put their
employment history twice into two different forms.
         SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Could you come up with -- I
don't want to belabor this, but couldn't you come up with a
mixed-use plaintiff form? We're only talking -- we're talking
about those who have submitted an acceptable PFS already, so
they're going to have their claim proceed no matter what as to
valsartan. Why not have -- why not put your heads together
and come up with a mixed-use claimant form where you can have
it all in one place for the mixed-use plaintiffs?
         Well, you have it in two places. You have it in the
valsartan PFS and the mixed-use PFS.
         MS. GOLDENBERG: I think that's fine, Your Honor.
mean, it's really no different than any other case where you
supplement your discovery and you've got two documents.
mean, that's fine with us.
         SPECIAL MASTER VANASKIE: Uh-huh. Ms. Deal?
         MS. DEAL: I mean, we'll follow the Court's
instructions.
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